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United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all; International Plan of Action; implementation of General Assembly resolution 56/116

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/116 of 19 December 2001 entitled "United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all". The report presents the Plan of Action of the United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all, and consists of the recommendations to implement a successful decade.

In its resolution 56/116, the General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Literacy Decade for the period 2003-2012 towards the goal of education for all. In that resolution, the Assembly took note of the draft proposal and plan for a United Nations literacy decade (A/56/114 and Add.1-E/2001/93 and Add.1), which it had requested in resolution 54/122, and decided that UNESCO should take a coordinating role in stimulating and catalysing the activities at the international level within the framework of the Decade.

The draft Plan of Action has been developed in compliance with paragraph 11 of resolution 56/116, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, to seek comments and proposals from Governments and the relevant international organizations on the draft plan for the Decade in order to develop and finalize a well targeted and action-oriented plan of action to be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

* A/57/150.

** The present report was submitted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on 15 July 2002.

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session adopted its resolution 56/116 entitled "United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all", in which it proclaimed the United Nations Literacy Decade for the period 2003-2012 towards the goal of Education for All. The proposal for a United Nations literacy decade was brought forward at the fifty-fourth session of the Assembly (see resolution 54/122), endorsed at the roundtable convened at the World Education Forum, held in Dakar in 2000, and reiterated by the Assembly at its special session, held in Geneva in 2000. The proclamation of the United Nations Literacy Decade by the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session was welcomed by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 2002/23 of 22 April 2002 on the right to education.

2. In the preamble to its resolution 56/116 the General Assembly states it is convinced that literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century. The resolution also supports the concept of literacy for all in its reaffirmation that literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy.

3. The United Nations Literacy Decade, as an integral component of Education for All, will provide both a platform and an impetus for achieving all six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action.[1]

The six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action

(1) Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

(2) Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

(3) Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;

(4) Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

(5) Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

(6) Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

[1] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Final Report of the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000* (Paris, 2000), annex II.

Literacy is the common thread that runs through the six goals. Indeed, the acquisition of stable and sustainable literacy skills by all will ensure that people can actively participate in a range of learning opportunities throughout life. Literacy for all is the foundation for lifelong learning for all and a tool for empowering individuals and their communities.

4. The plan of action builds on the draft proposal and plan for a United Nations literacy decade (A/56/114 and Add.1-E/2001/93 and Add.1) and articulates essential requirements and the focus of actions for the successful implementation of the Literacy Decade as a thrust of Education for All efforts. It aims to stimulate action taken by national Governments, local communities, individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, public and private organizations and civil society in their broad coalition. It also aims to mobilize international agencies and national Governments for forging global commitments.

II. Literacy for All: the vision

5. In the rapidly changing world of today's knowledge society, with the progressive use of newer and innovative technological means of communication, literacy requirements continue to expand regularly. In order to survive in today's globalized world, it has become necessary for all people to learn new literacies and develop the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information in multiple manners. As recalled in paragraph 8 of the draft proposal and plan for a United Nations literacy decade, "Literacy policies and programmes today require going beyond the limited view of literacy that has dominated in the past. Literacy for all requires **a renewed vision of literacy** ...".

6. The vision for the Literacy Decade situates Literacy for All at the heart of Education for All. Literacy is central to all levels of education, especially basic education, through all delivery modes — formal, non-formal and informal. Literacy for All encompasses the educational needs of all human beings in all settings and contexts, in the North and the South, the urban and the rural, those in school and those out-of-school, adults and children, boys and girls, and men and women.

7. Literacy for All has to address the literacy needs of the individual as well as the family, literacy in the workplace and in the community, as well as in society and in the nation, in tune with the goals of economic, social and cultural development of all people in all countries. Literacy for All will be effectively achieved only when it is planned and implemented in local contexts of language and culture, ensuring gender equity and equality, fulfilling learning aspirations of local communities and groups of people. Literacy must be related to various dimensions of personal and social life, as well as to development. Thus, literacy efforts must be related to a comprehensive package of economic, social and cultural policies cutting across multiple sectors. Literacy policies must also recognize the significance of the mother tongue in acquiring literacy and provide for literacy in multiple languages wherever necessary.

III. Priority groups

8. Literacy for All focuses on a range of priority groups. In the countries of the South, particularly, women's literacy must be addressed urgently. The priority population groups to be addressed are:

- Non-literate youth and adults, especially women, who have not been able to acquire adequate skills to use literacy for their personal development and for improving their quality of life
- Out-of-school children and youth, especially girls, adolescent girls and young women
- Children in school without access to quality learning so that they do not add to the pool of adult non-literates.

Of the priority population referred to above, certain more disadvantaged groups urgently require special attention, in particular, ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous populations, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, aged people and pre-school children — especially those who have little or no access to early childhood care and education.

IV. Expected outcomes

9. National Governments, local authorities, international agencies and all stakeholders are to ensure that by the end of the Literacy Decade, the

Literacy for All thrust of Education for All will yield the following outcomes:

(a) Significant progress towards the 2015 Dakar goals 3, 4 and 5, in particular, a recognizable increase in the absolute numbers of those who are literate among:

(i) Women — accompanied by a reduction in gender disparities;

(ii) Excluded pockets in countries that are otherwise considered to have high literacy rates;

(iii) Regions with the greatest needs, namely, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and E-9 countries;

(b) Attainment by all learners, including children in school, of a mastery level of learning in reading, writing, numeracy, critical thinking, positive citizenship values and other life skills;

(c) Dynamic literate environments, especially in schools and communities of the priority groups, so that literacy will be sustained and expanded beyond the Literacy Decade;

(d) Improved quality of life (poverty reduction, increased income, improved health, greater participation, citizenship awareness and gender sensitivity) among those who have participated in the various educational programmes under Education for All.

V. Principal strategies

10. In order to attain the above-mentioned outcomes, the implementation process of the Literacy Decade needs to be focused on the following actions as principal strategies, which are essential for attaining and maintaining the outcomes but are largely overlooked currently:

(a) Placing literacy at the centre of all levels of national education systems and developmental efforts;

(b) Adopting a two-pronged approach, giving equal importance to both formal and non-formal education modalities with synergy between the two;

(c) Promoting an environment supportive of uses of literacy and a culture of reading in schools and communities;

(d) Ensuring community involvement in literacy programmes and their ownership by communities;

(e) Building partnerships at all levels, particularly at the national level, between the Government, civil society, the private sector and local communities, as well as at the subregional, regional and international levels;

(f) Developing systematic monitoring and evaluation processes at all levels, supported by research findings and databases.

VI. Key areas for action

11. For the successful implementation of the Literacy Decade for Literacy for All, the aforementioned principal strategies must be put in place in reality at all levels through actions that are coordinated and complement each other. The key areas for action are policy, programme modality, capacity-building, research, community participation and monitoring and evaluation. It must be stressed that all actions must address the gender equality perspective in all its ramifications.

A. Policy

12. Develop a policy environment across communities, sectors, agencies and ministries that mainstreams the promotion of literacy by undertaking the following:

(a) Develop a policy framework and incentive scheme that ensures multi-ministerial collaboration as well as a financing scheme to enhance literacy programmes in formal, non-formal and informal education, spelling out expected roles of the private sector, civil society and individuals;

(b) Engage communities (including community-based organizations, families and individuals), civil society organizations, universities and research institutes, mass media and the private sector in providing input into literacy policy;

(c) Provide a framework for the context-sensitive development of a literate environment, such as:

- Promoting multilingual and multicultural education
- Encouraging local literature production
- Encouraging participation of the book publishing industry and establishing and supporting community libraries towards Reading for All
- Widening access to tools for expression and communication, such as newspapers, radio, television and information and communication technologies, as well as promoting freedom of expression;

(d) Ensure that literacy is part of broad discussions on poverty reduction, e.g. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, multi-agency collaboration, such as the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework, as well as education, e.g. Education for All planning and the Sector-wide Approach;

(e) Ensure that the promotion of literacy is an integral part of planning and implementation for educational components relating to health, agriculture, rural and urban development, conflict and crisis prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, HIV/AIDS prevention, environment and other intersectoral issues;

(f) Put literacy on the agenda at national, subregional, regional and international forums on development and education, e.g. United Nations summits, G-8, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), conferences of ministers of education, regional partnership mechanisms such as New Partnerships for Development in Africa and national development consultations.

B. Programme modality

13. In order to achieve Literacy for All and thus Education for All goals, which cut across all age groups in and out of school, literacy programmes must cover the whole life cycle so as to make possible lifelong learning and be gender-sensitive, and must be delivered through both non-formal and formal approaches. They must also be built on the already available literacy programmes and, at the same time, should add newer literacy programmes by forecasting the future literacy needs. It is therefore essential to recognize the need for the following actions:

(a) Develop programmes which aim at meaningful uses of literacy in addition to the acquisition of the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy, spanning various age groups from pre-school age to adulthood. Such programmes could encompass literacy readiness for pre-school children as well as family literacy and literacy for primary schoolchildren, school dropouts, out-of-school children and adolescents and non-literate youth and adults, addressing such content needs as:

- Literacy for vocational upgrading and employment
- Post-literacy and continuing education programmes for a variety of client groups, including information and communication technology literacy
- Information literacy, including media literacy, legal literacy and scientific literacy;

(b) Design programmes that give learner motivation a high priority by meeting the needs of learners and supporting a literate environment. The following actions are suggested to this end:

- Develop diverse modes of delivery, including the use of information and communication technologies
- Develop gender-sensitive content, materials and methodology, building on local languages, knowledge and culture
- Integrate literacy instruction in other sectors, such as health education, agricultural extension education and income-generation schemes
- Have reading materials available for children and adults in the mother tongue and a second language in schools and communities;

(c) Establish linkages and synergy between formal and non-formal education through the following:

- Develop equivalency programmes to bridge formal and non-formal education by establishing, inter alia, policies, guidelines and accreditation mechanisms

- Upgrade the credentials of literacy facilitators through professional training and by providing official recognition to non-formal education facilitators on par with formal schoolteachers
- Establish distance education programmes that enable people who have left formal education to progress at their own pace until they are ready to re-enter the formal education system
- Encourage bridges between teachers' associations and non-formal education facilitators.

C. Capacity-building

14. In order to implement educational programmes as part of the Decade, it is necessary to ensure that various partners and stakeholders have the requisite capacities for running such programmes in a sustained manner in such areas as those listed below:

(a) Planning and management: organize capacity-building activities for educational planners and decision-makers at regional, subregional, national and local levels, built into ongoing educational programmes, in such areas as fund-raising, programme designing and implementation, multisectoral cooperation, project documentation and reporting;

(b) Research: design programmes for strengthening the capacity of NGOs, community-based organizations and civil society organizations to carry out action research;

(c) Training of trainers: identify and support a core group of trainers at regional, subregional, national and subnational levels who can train programme personnel, including teachers and facilitators at the local level;

(d) Training systems: develop training systems that are gender-sensitive and can be adapted to different contexts and purposes and used at subnational and local levels;

(e) Curriculum: develop literacy curriculum frameworks at regional, subregional and national levels that can be adapted to local curricula and lesson plans according to the needs of specific learner groups at the local level.

D. Research

15. In order to use research findings for the formulation of literacy policy effectively, the improvement of literacy programmes and the periodic review of progress towards Literacy for All, specific and well-designed research activities and projects will have to be undertaken during the Literacy Decade, which include the following:

(a) For the purpose of policy formulation: conduct baseline studies for identification of, inter alia, priority groups, levels of literacy, local needs, resource availability, likely partnerships and mapping gender disparities;

(b) For improving primary schools and non-formal education programmes: conduct process research to enable educational planners and administrators to make mid-course corrections on the basis of research findings;

(c) For deeper insights into the concept of Literacy for All: conduct longitudinal studies on the uses of literacy in schools and communities, and map emerging and new literacy practices in the context of information and communication technologies;

(d) For empowerment of local communities: conduct research in how local communities can participate in literacy programmes and derive benefits from such programmes;

(e) For research utilization: critically review relevant research in the North and South, for adoption and adaptation of research results for use in policy and practice in new contexts.

16. The following actions are proposed for facilitating the development of the aforementioned research activities:

(a) Create a database on literacy studies, including evaluation studies;

(b) Encourage universities, institutions of higher education and research institutions to put literacy on their research agendas;

(c) Create networks of research organizations for cooperation between countries and regions, ensuring participation from the North as well as the South and encouraging cooperation between countries of the South.

E. Community participation

17. The success of the Literacy for All programme depends on the extent of the involvement of the local community in the programme and the willingness of the local community to take on the ownership of the programme. It is important that the Government should not seek community involvement as a cost-cutting strategy and it must be remembered that occasional campaigns and festivals do not ensure community participation in educational programmes. Some of the steps in securing community participation are the following:

(a) Document experiences of governmental organizations, NGOs and the private sector regarding community participation in literacy programmes;

(b) Provide technical and financial support for sustaining community-based programmes of literacy;

(c) Create subnational/national networks of NGOs working with local communities for literacy;

(d) Encourage local communities to organize community learning centres;

(e) Share experiences of successful community learning centre programmes among countries;

(f) Develop appropriate tools for communication between Governments and communities as well as among communities, including the use of information and communication technologies.

F. Monitoring and evaluation

18. For the success of the Literacy for All programme, it is necessary to build functional monitoring information systems across various programmes and different levels (institutional/subnational/national/international). The systems should be designed to provide reliable and meaningful information on the status of literacy among the population, on the uses and impact of literacy and on the performance and effectiveness of literacy programmes. The following actions are proposed for building an effective monitoring and evaluation system:

(a) Refine literacy indicators and methodologies to enable countries systematically to collect and disseminate more and better information, with particular attention to providing information on gender gaps;

(b) Promote widespread and better use of population data, for example through demographic censuses and surveys, in monitoring literacy status, use and impact among the population;

(c) Develop cost-effective methods for assessing literacy levels of individuals for use in literacy surveys, as well as in the regular evaluation of learning outcomes at the programme level;

(d) Build information systems to support policies and management of non-formal education among agencies, programmes, learners and educators;

(e) Establish long-term tracking systems of new literates for studying the impact of literacy on the quality of life.

VII. Implementation at the national level

19. The State must play the central and crucial role in planning, coordinating, implementing and financing programmes for Literacy for All. In order to fulfil this role, the State must build symbiotic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. It is therefore necessary to mobilize the local communities, NGOs, teachers' associations and workers' unions, universities and research institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders to contribute to and participate in all stages of literacy programmes.

20. The successful implementation of the Literacy Decade requires that Literacy for All be the central focus of all Education for All plans and programmes. Thus, it is necessary to remember that a plan for the Literacy Decade and its implementation at the national level must be incorporated in the national Education for All plan and its implementation. Where the national Education for All plan has already been formulated, the Literacy for All component can be added as a supplement. Where the national Education for All plan is being finalized, it would be appropriate to incorporate the Literacy for All component within it. In the process of incorporating a Literacy for All component in the Education for All plans, a checklist of questions and key elements can be a useful guide. A sample checklist is contained in annex I.

21. The Literacy Decade must be viewed as a unity, not as a sum of 10 successive single years. Every country, therefore, must plan within its own 10-year perspective for implementing Literacy for All. In so doing, attention should be paid to ensuring that the initial period of the Decade is devoted to the creation of comprehensive and reliable databases on literacy. An example of such a 10-year time frame is contained in annex II.

VIII. Resource mobilization

22. The Literacy for All intervention must not suffer or languish on account of insufficient funding. Governments need to mobilize adequate resources in support of Literacy for All. The following strategies may be adopted at the national level:

(a) Incorporate the Literacy for All component across the budget for all levels of education, from basic to higher education;

(b) Attract additional funding through coordination and resource sharing with other ministries and departments where literacy is a component of programmes of advocacy, extension education and poverty reduction;

(c) Mobilize the private sector and civil society to support the Literacy for All programme.

At the international level, successful resource mobilization will require:

(a) Ongoing consultation among United Nations agencies in support of Literacy for All as a component of Education for All;

(b) Involvement of bilateral agencies for their financial support and commitments;

(c) Mobilization of international civil society in support of Literacy for All.

A special role should be given to the World Bank with the task of integrating the Decade in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and preparing a special funding chapter with Education for All. At the regional level, it is also possible to attract financial resources from regional organizations and regional banks. In order to attract international funding, it is essential to formulate credible projects based on research, justifying investment in literacy. These projects must also have carefully worked out costs and effects based on actual studies.

IX. International support and coordination

23. The United Nations system as a whole sets the promotion of literacy in the context of human rights, seen as indivisible and interdependent. The right to education, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which literacy is both a crucial element and a tool, connects with the right to equality (especially gender equality), to development, to health and to freedom of expression. United Nations agencies as well as the World Bank engaged in these various sectors recognize these connections and frequently include literacy as one of the problems to be addressed and solved in conjunction with the fulfilment of other rights. As the coordinating agency at the international level for the achievement of the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All, as well as for the Literacy Decade, UNESCO will work within the Education for All coordination mechanism already established, through which it will identify literacy components in the ongoing development programmes of various international and bilateral agencies and forge joint mobilization and maximum use of resources among these agencies in support of the Decade.

24. In consultation with the relevant United Nations agencies, UNESCO will work towards creating meaningful and goal-oriented partnerships in order to encourage inclusive planning and implementation of the Literacy Decade. Such a partnership will ensure efficient delivery of different inputs provided by the United Nations agencies. A key partner will be the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the lead agency in the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative. The World Bank will work with UNESCO in literacy assessment and cost and financing analysis for literacy, for which OECD and UNICEF can also be key partners. UNESCO will facilitate cooperation among other United Nations agencies whose mandates and programmes are strongly relevant to achieving Literacy for All, such as those listed below:

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: rural development, agricultural extension programmes

- International Labour Organization: learning and training for work, elimination of child labour
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: right to education, gender equality, right to development, right to freedom of expression, indigenous peoples (languages, cultures, knowledge)
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS: education about HIV/AIDS
- United Nations Development Programme: rural development, participatory citizenship, democratic governance, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihood
- United Nations Population Fund: teacher training and curriculum development regarding reproductive health and population
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: education as a key issue in supporting refugee children
- World Food Programme: Food for Education
- World Health Organization: Health for All, primary healthcare education, access to health information, safe motherhood, HIV/AIDS prevention.

Annex I

Sample checklist for implementation at the national level

Key questions

- What is the current status of literacy in the country?
- What is the status of literacy programmes in schools?
- What literacy programmes are being implemented?
- What are the relationships between these programmes and other programmes for social and economic development?
- What are the problems/bottlenecks in running these programmes?
- How will Literacy for All be incorporated in the Education for All plans?
- Which priority groups need to be included in the literacy programmes during the Decade?
- What types of literacy should be included in the programmes of Literacy for All?
- What kind of data is needed for planning further input for these programmes?
- What proportion of the education budget should go to literacy programmes?
- Where and how can additional funding be obtained? (e.g. private sector, bilateral sources, regional and international bodies)
- What roles are to be played by whom in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the programmes for Literacy for All?

Essential elements

- Policy and planning: plan for the Literacy Decade through incorporating a Literacy for All component in Education for All plans, with a realistic time frame for the entire 10-year period of the Literacy Decade
- Advocacy: draw up plans for advocacy actions at all levels in cooperation with all stakeholders, such as government functionaries, NGOs, civil society, institutions, funding agencies, local communities, local governments and potential learners
- Capacity-building: develop training programmes for all categories of stakeholders in the areas of planning, research, training, curriculum development, materials development, monitoring and evaluation
- Partnership: build effective partnerships with other ministries, NGOs, civil society, institutions, universities, the private sector, funding agencies, international agencies, United Nations agencies and the media
- Research: carry out baseline study for priority identification; support action research for developing alternative models and process research to review programme implementation

- Monitoring and evaluation: establish and activate realistic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; develop databases and keep track of current status of literacy
- Celebration: plan regular celebrations of the Literacy Decade on International Literacy Day in order to maintain momentum and commitment; plan regular media events as part of the celebrations
- Resource support: ensure adequate human and financial resources.

Annex II

Example of a 10-year time frame for the United Nations Literacy Decade

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
I. Policy: policy forums	National forums	National forums	National forums	National forums	National forums	National forums	National forums	National forums		
		Regional forums		Regional forums		Regional forums		Regional forums		
II. Research	Baseline research workshops									
	Database creation									
	Five-year research and experimentation programme in the use of ICTs for literacy learners									
III. Monitoring and evaluation	Indicator and assessment methodology development								National Assessment Forums	Regional Assessment Forums
IV. Capacity building: regional training programme design workshops		Workshops [redacted]		Workshops			Workshops			
V and VI. Community participation and bottom-up approach	National and subnational consultations	National and subnational consultations	National and subnational consultations		National and subnational consultations		National and subnational consultations		National and subnational consultations	
Information and exchange	Sustained strategic exchanges and sustained virtual forum									International Literacy Conference
International Literacy Day activities: possible themes	8 September 2003: Gender equality	8 September 2004: Diversity	8 September 2005: Creative literacy	8 September 2006: Teachers and facilitators	8 September 2007: Half-way celebration	8 September 2008: Quality	8 September 2009: Participation	8 September 2010: Literacy for Health	8 September 2011: Materials and literature	8 September 2012: Celebration